

# PFLAG EDMONTON

Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays

January 1996

## NEXT MEETING:

TUESDAY, JANUARY 16, '96

7:30pm

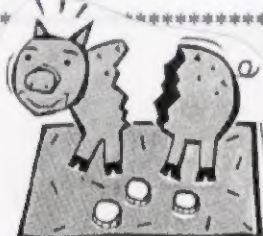
101112 - 124 St

Lower Floor

As always we welcome parents, families and friends of/and lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgendered people of all ages, faiths, and ethnic backgrounds.

Coffee will be served!

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PFLAG Edmonton also welcomes your \$\$\$! We continually need more monies to fund our support and educational efforts (e.g. high school posters, Greater Edmonton Teachers' Association conference Feb 29 & Mar 1/96 - display table, PFLAG Edmonton newsletter, etc.)

If your rich uncle, or someone else, is particularly kind to you during the holidays, would you help PFLAG out by making a donation or purchasing a membership? Thankyou! Please mail your cheque or money order to:

PFLAG Membership



LOVE  
IN ACTION  
JOY IN DIVERSITY



### MEMBERSHIP RATES:

Student:	\$15
Individual	\$20
Household	\$30
Newsletter only	\$15
Donation	—

PFLAG Edmonton is a **non-profit** and **all volunteer** support group not affiliated with any ethnic, political or religious organization. Memberships are available to all. Any information collected remains strictly confidential.

## PFLAG SUPPORT

### The Parents' Closet

by Len Hooper

(courtesy of Cornwall Standard-Freeholder, July, 1995)

Joe and Marie are living an ironic truth shared by many parents of gay children. When the children come out of the closet, the parents often go in. The Cornwall couple, parents of five children, had a double shock last year when two sons—one 25, the other 20—told them they were gay, within a month of each other.

"We suspected but didn't really think about it with one son. He never, ever talked about girls," said Marie. "But we didn't even suspect with the other son."

Joe and Marie (not their real names) handled the news better than some parents. They immediately told both sons they still loved them unconditionally. "Your children are your children are your children, no matter what," said Joe.

I don't understand how parents could reject their own children because of something like this," added Marie. "I mean, there are some parents out there who will stick by a child if he's charged with murder, but not if he's gay.





That's not to say Joe and Marie celebrated the fact that two of their children were gay. But they have grown to accept it and to respect their sons for "having the courage to be open/"

And they've been forced to rethink their views on homosexuality, views shaped by the society they grew up in and their religion.

It's been a big step for Joe and Marie, lifelong Roman Catholics. "We don't believed it's a sin," said Joe. "You're taught to think that, but it doesn't make any sense if you think about it."

"God made people, including gay people," added Marie. "Gays are born gay. You don't choose your sexual preference. One of our sons said he knew he was different when he was four."

Although their church has been a source of support and comfort for other things in their lives, Joe and Marie have yet to tell anyone at their parish. They simply don't trust them enough...

Like other parents of gay children, Joe and Marie found themselves at a different stage of acceptance when the news was first broken.

The child has usually spent years coming to grips with his or her sexuality and may already have a support system in place, including straight friends whom they have already told. But for the parents, it's a whole new scene.

"It's frustrating," said Marie. "We grew up in a homophobic society. You feel guilt. You wonder if it had something to do with your parenting or something you did when you were pregnant. Ridiculous things like that."

The couple also have one child still in high school and they're afraid of the reaction if word gets out that

his brothers are gay. "High school is tough enough," Joe said. "Kids can be very cruel."

Meanwhile they say everybody needs a place where they can talk things out and be open without being judged.

That's where PFLAG - Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays, an international support groups with over 389 chapters - comes in.

Marie attended her first meeting in December in Ottawa. "It was amazing," said Marie. "The atmosphere was accepting and non-judgmental. I came out of that meeting feeling 100% better than I did when I walked in!"

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### **PFLAG EDUCATION**

#### **The Need to Educate Professionals**

In order to save the lives of the many wonderful lesbian and gay teenagers committing suicide each year in Alberta it is necessary to educate the people they look to both for support and as role models. These people include teachers, public health nurses, school counsellors, psychologists, social workers, and psychiatrists.

How can this be done? One way of reaching these professionals is to present workshops and display tables at their local professional conventions. In this way members of PFLAG are available to conventioners as resource people to talk to and from whom informative and supportive literature may be

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obtained, e.g. posters of gay and lesbian students; posters of famous lesbian and gay people in history; lists of helpful books and videos; lists of PFLAG groups and other resource groups and gay +ve churches; information on sexual orientation, on teen suicide (especially lesbian and gay suicide), on human rights, on how professionals can help, on why professionals should help, on gay +ve schools, etc.

In our 1995/96 season PFLAG Edmonton has or will be involved in a social workers convention and one or two teachers' conventions. ANYONE having any information which would help us to contact professionals in other fields, who may be having conventions in Edmonton, please forward your information to Ellen at:

- [redacted] Res, or
- [redacted] Bus, or
- [redacted]

**THANKYOU!**

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### **PFLAG SUPPORT/EDUCATION**

#### **"Taking the Next Step"**

(Excerpt of an article by Marge Heineman reprinted from the Philadelphia Chapter, adapted from the Washington DC newsletter, courtesy of the Vancouver newsletter!)

Jeanne Manford's son Morty once said, "I think people like my mother have been particularly effective because the general public will listen to parents in a different way than they will listen to advocates who are gay".





For some chapter members "taking the next step" means those initial steps of coming out of friends and coworkers... For others, "the next step" might be letter writing -- to politicians or companies or television stations. There are many ways to make a difference. Over the past year I have developed a strong belief in the "miracle of the meeting" and I have seen this miracle again and again. The meeting brings people together. The miracle is that they make connections, they learn from each other and they begin working together.



#### BOOK OF THE MONTH

##### *THE FAMILY HEART*

(by Robb Forman Dew)

A true story told by Mrs. Dew of emotions and events affecting her and her husband after their elder son informed them that he is gay. This book does not analyze, judge or influence, but simply describes Mrs. Dew's life as she clumsily tries to overcome her ignorance of homosexuality. It remains true to form, a mother's story. *The Family Heart* touched me in so many ways, a confirmation of my own feelings and actions. This is a very positive book for those parents who perhaps doubt their own thoughts and emotions during their time of family turmoil and the search for family peace and harmony. \* \* \* \*

Elsie

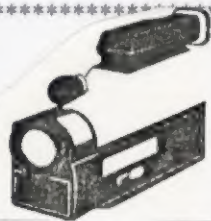
In addition to the five books mentioned in the November PFLAG newsletter, our library also contains the following:

6. *Stranger at the Gate*  
by Mel White

7. *Joining Tribe*  
by Linnea Due

8. *Straight Parents Gay Children*  
by Robert A. Bernstein

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#### VIDEOS OF THE MONTH

##### *MARDI GRAS!*

Scenes taken from the 1993 Gay Parade in Sydney Australia and produced by ABC, this spectacular "happening" was viewed by two million folks at home and by the thousands watching from Sydney's sidewalks. (60 minutes)

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##### *GAY GENE*

This is a film about recent (1993) biological discoveries and the theories stemming from these discoveries. Also included are interviews with gay men, an historical perspective and the views of some right wing groups. Some nudity. (45 minutes)

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##### *GUESS WHO'S COMING TO DINNER!*

An unusual dinner party introduces 10 HIV +ve persons. In this very touching ABC documentary they discuss their lives, feelings and expectations. (56 minutes)

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##### *BRAIN SEX*

This is a three-part program from the CBC "Witness" series. Based on the book by the same name, and using instructive sequences by

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independent film-makers, the three 50-minute parts deal with sex differences, behavior and relationships.

Also on this tape is the BBC's *SEX UNDER SIEGE*, a look at biological sex abnormalities in some species of animals which has resulted from chemical pollution of the environment. (45 minutes)

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#### PFLAG ADVOCACY

Love in Action/ Joy in Diversity

(Courtesy of PFLAG Olympia)

Rev. Mel White, former ghost writer for several anti-gay televangelists, suggests the following strategy in our struggle to gain public acceptance of our "lesbigat" children:

- believe that God (the universe) is on the side of justice;
- believe in each human being as an amazing force for positive change;
- see your adversary, not as evil, but as a victim of misinformation;
- win your adversary's friendship;
- speak the truth in love;
- attach the false idea, not the person who holds the idea;
- believe it is as much a moral obligation to refuse to cooperate with evil as to cooperate with the good;
- make the means as pure as the end;
- insist on non-violence;





- avoid violence of the spirit;
- absorb and accept suffering without retaliation;
- do not fear death.

The number of PFLAG chapters internationally now stands at 389 and growing. Membership exceeds 50,000 members. Several chapters have received large grants to conduct training for educators and school-based organizations.

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#### "ALBERTA MUST GET IN STEP"

(Courtesy of The Edmonton Journal, Dec. 7, 1995)

Alberta will soon be forced to protect homosexuals from discrimination in provincial legislation, predicts the head of the Alberta Human Rights Commission.

"I think it's coming," said chief commissioner Charlach Mackintosh, "Everywhere except Alberta basically accepts the fact that you shouldn't discriminate against homosexuals."

But the government indicated Wednesday it has no intention of legislating protection for gays.

The provincial government is awaiting word on its appeal of the Delwin Vriend decision, a Court of Queen's Bench ruling ordering the province to include sexual orientation as protected grounds in its Individual Rights Protection Act. But Mackintosh said he would be surprised if the appeal court didn't uphold that ruling. "And frankly, it would surprise me if the government decided to challenge again" to the Supreme Court.

A government report on human rights has

- **Accepted:**
- changing the name of the Individual's Rights Protection Act to the Human Rights Act;
- considering aboriginal spirituality as a religion, making the commission more accessible to aboriginals;
- adding temporary staff to clear the backlog of cases;
- replacing individual boards of inquiry with a standing panel;
- rewriting the act in plain language;
- prohibiting discrimination based on marital status or family status.

#### Rejected:

- prohibiting discrimination on basis of sexual orientation, political belief or receipt of social assistance;
- making the commission accountable to the legislature, rather than the minister;
- letting the commission manage its own budget and staff;
- allowing commission members or employees to initiate complaints;
- extending six-month limitation period for complaints to one year or longer;
- choosing the chief commissioner with an all-party legislative committee;
- extending protection from bias to all ages.

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## EDMONTON

...and the day came when the risk to remain tight in a bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom.

Anais Niri

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### EVENTS CALENDAR

#### EVM

#### *A Proud Family*

Saturday, February 24, 1996

@ 8:00 p.m.

Convocation Hall

University of Alberta

EVM in its diverse forms including jazz combo, classical organ and piano, modern dance and songs for children. We will also be premiering a new work by the winner of Edmonton Vocal Minority's Choral Composition Competition.

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#### *DANCE MARATHON!*

Friday, February 2, 1996

9:00 p.m. to 9:00 a.m.

10155 - 112 St

(wheelchair accessible)

Fundraiser! Pick up your entry forms at GLCC (early in January) to record your sponsors

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#### *WOMONSPACE*

#### *VALENTINE'S DANCE!*

Saturday, February 17, 1996

8:00 p.m. - 1:00 a.m.

Bonnie Doon Community Hall

Members \$5; Nonmembers \$8





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# It's A Gay Life!

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January 1996

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## TURNING POINTS

BY GRAHAM WATTS

I am seated in a circle of gay men, in the Forest Room of St. Stephen's College, on the university campus. Each is telling, in turn, about his life. The Gay Men's Outreach Crew fall workshop, "Coming Out in the 90's, has begun.

I listen while the men struggle with memories, deciding how much they will reveal, how much they will hold back. And the facilitator asks when each man is done, "Was there a turning point?" Some reply immediately. Some hesitate unable to pinpoint just when they changed direction.

For me there is not just one turning point, there are many that explain why I am here and how I think, and what I want for the remaining years of my life. Each cannot exist without the one before it. Some are abrupt turns; some are gradual, some not worth mentioning. For you to understand me, we need to take a trip - a trip around the world.

Our first stop: The country is Australia; the state is Queensland, the city--Brisbane. The years is 1935 and I am about to take the first major turning point in my lifestyle thus far. It is a Sunday, January 20. I receive birth.

And my family moves down to the South East corner of the state, to the farming district of Slack's Creek. There is no country town

here, just small farms. There are two public buildings: an Anglican



Church where services are held twice a month, and a school. It has two rooms two teachers, with sixty pupils--mixed gender. And I am now 10 years old.

Two years earlier I was awakened to my maleness by two teenage boys on the neighboring farm. How grateful I am to them! And now this boy, older by a couple of years than I, comes into our district. He is to spend the next few months at his uncle's farm, a mile beyond my dad's farm. But before he attends the school, the teachers talk to all the parents. My mother is quite upset. I can't think why? I find him fascinating.

School is out at 3:30pm. All the kids from the farms in our direction set out on the walk home. This boy and I dawdle. And under the bridge that carries the road over Slack's Creek, I discover what it is that attracts me to him.

My brother is home from school already, and we are coming up the hill toward the gate into my father's farm and..

"Oh shit! There's my mother standing on the side of the road."

We are getting closer and her yells are becoming screams...

At this point my memory stops dead. I can't remember what she does or what she says. I can't remember another thing about that boy, but I'm willing to bet that I never touched his penis again.

Compulsory school ends at grade seven, and I am fourteen, and if I want to go on, the only high schools, all gender-specific, are in the city. That mean, finding board and lodgings. Most country kids don't go on. I don't. I go to work at a local nursery that specialized in growing roses. So I miss the teenage opportunity of being with other boys to explore and confirm my sexual feelings with them.

And it is lonely in the country. My mother thinks that I should go dancing--as my brother did before me--on the Saturday night circuit. All the district schools, in turn,



become places of courtship for their past pupils. But I don't. I just grow older, leave my home, and my country.

New Zealand. The North Island. Auckland. It's the late 50's. A new guy starts at the place where I am working. "Hey! He's cute." and I enter my first relationship. I'm scared. Is this what I want to do?

It doesn't last long. I take counsel with myself and decide that I need to move on.

It's 1960. I arrive in London, England. I'm over 21, I can go into a pub and I do and I hate it. It's not just the smoke and the dull conversation, it's the stink of beer, and god-knows what else. After my fourth visit I quit. To this day I still do not go to bars and clubs. There's another thing I find that I hate--parties. I'm isolated again. It's like growing up was: I'm safe, confused, and frustrated.

Saturday, November 12, 1966, 3:00pm, and I am getting married to the receptionist of the company I am working for, the only woman whom I ever dated.

About a year into the marriage I am thinking, "Graham, this isn't the smartest thing you've ever done in your life." The married heterosexual men I know all admire the scenery. And as a married gay I do too, except it's not their wives I'm looking at, it's they. Finally, I admit to myself how I feel and what I really want.

One thing I believe in very strongly is sticking to a commitment. I've committed myself to a marriage. Any gay action is now long past. I do not accept extramarital affairs as a possible alternative.

Calgary, Alberta, March 1969. Edmonton, Alberta, February 1970. My two daughters are born. I begin the not exciting period of



learning in my life. I am so glad that I never missed this.

And now it's Friday, June 4, 1982, at eight minutes past six. My wife dies in a motor accident on her way home from work. My commitment to a heterosexual lifestyle is at an end. Again I have a choice. I can go into another heterosexual relationship, or start again where I left off in the gay world. I've been away from the gay scene for a long time, and a lot has changed over the years. There's this gay disease that everyone's talking about. It's all very scary.

But hang on a minute! I'm a single parent. I've got two daughters, 12 and 13 years of age. The first thing that I do is open wide the channel of communication with my children, but that can never be 100%. There are always some secrets.

So I make a promise to them. "I'll do no such thing," I say. "But when you are grown up and leave home to make your own way in life, then I must be free to do whatever I want to do." They agree, but I find another worry. What if I decide to date? What if I go out with the same woman three or four times in a row? How much anxiety will this cause them? What if it's a man I am dating regularly? There is much more talk about

## It's A Gay Life!

being gay now. Will they begin to wonder?

I decide to shut down my life totally. I allow myself no social activity at all for the next nine years. Yeah, I've found a way to isolate myself again. Am I really that scared?

I'm in the driver's seat. I've set a goal for myself to teach the girls to be tolerant; to realize that they must decide for themselves what is good and bad, not leave the thinking to someone else. I do have some anxious moments thinking about it, but when I come out to them, there isn't a ripple. They get excited at the news. "Neat, dad!" they say.

The first two phases of coming out are behind me: to myself and to my daughter, my only family in Canada. I'll never have to repeat these phases. I breathe easy.

It's now on to phase three, the world at large, the one phase that is always repeating itself, even day after day. This, to me, is the most exciting phase in the whole process. I love it. I like the spectacular, the dramatic. But no matter what way I decide to do it, the risk, the scariness, make it fun. I particularly love to come out to salespersons and religious people who come to my door. To the phone canvassers. And what I truly love is when I'm out shopping--coming out to the sales clerks. It's a hoot. That must be a sport in the next gay games!

The best way I can help the gay community, I decide, is to chip away at the wall of homophobia. And I do. I'm sometimes blunt about it, you might think arrogant, but my approach is this: "Look," I say, "I'm a Gay White Male, 60, seeking same; either you accept me as I am, or you see a therapist."